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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BRUSSELS 000475

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STATE FOR EUR/WE AND SA/A

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MOPS](#) [MARR](#) [EAID](#) [BE](#)

SUBJECT: BELGIAN MFA ON NEW RESOURCES FOR AFGHANISTAN

REF: A. STATE 31102

[B](#). STATE 29482

[C](#). STATE 28929

[D](#). BRUSSELS 468

[E](#). BRUSSELS 412

Classified By: Political Counselor Richard Eason, reason 1.4(b) and (d)

[1](#). (C) The Belgian government has been considering for the past several weeks what actions it can take to support the need for an enhanced effort against the Taliban in Afghanistan, as outlined in the ref B white paper. Embassy delivered the white paper to the Belgian MFA's Office of Security Affairs (including NATO Affairs) and the Afghanistan desk on March 27. We delivered the ref C list of deliverables for the NATO summit to the MFA and to the Prime Minister's Diplomatic Advisor, Dirk Wouters, on March 26.

[2](#). (C) Foreign Minister Karel De Gucht attended the "big tent" conference on Afghanistan on March 31. Then, on April 1, the "kern" or core cabinet of the most important ministers approved new contributions to Afghanistan, as reported ref D. We spoke to Pol De Witte, Director for Security Policy at the MFA on April 1 and delivered the ref A non-paper with its list of requests. De Witte repeated the cabinet's decision to extend all its existing military commitments in Afghanistan through the end of 2010, send two additional F-16's to Kandahar, bringing the total of Belgian aircraft in the country to six, and to send a second Operational Mentoring and Liaison Team (OMLT) to the country. De Witte said the Belgian commitment will be reassessed in 2010.

[3](#). (C) Confirming statements made to the press by the Prime Minister and Minister for Development Cooperation Michel, De Witte said that an "agreement in principle" to double Belgium's official development assistance to Afghanistan to approximately 14 million euros has been reached in the cabinet. No specifics of how to use the money have been agreed, he said, and the source of the funds is still up for negotiation. When Poloff delivered the list of development needs transmitted ref A to De Witte, he said that they would be very useful to the GOB as plans are developed.

[4](#). (C) In interviews published on April 1, PM Van Rompuy told the press that President Obama has "an attractive approach towards Afghanistan, with a broader strategy than the military one only, for the first time also thinking of an exit strategy. Belgium as a consequence needs to make sure that it grants him at least as much support as to the Bush administration." Van Rompuy stressed that the decision to send more troops and materiel to Afghanistan is not an easy one for the government to take, because of the "traumas of the world wars", the unpopularity of the war in Afghanistan as an initiative of the Bush administration, and the uncertainty of success of the mission. Still, he concluded that the Obama administration's "multidisciplinary" approach to the Afghanistan problem is more "European" and therefore "Belgium must contribute to it."

15. (C) After Poloff presented ref A requests to De Witte, De Witte noted that Belgium is not opposed to a NATO AWACS mission in Afghanistan as is assumed in ref A paragraph 24. In fact, the Belgian cabinet has approved participation by Belgian crew members if the mission is approved by NATO. However, they do want to see common funding for the mission, which would mean that all NATO members would be obliged to pay for it, according to De Witte. We have discussed the idea of making Afghanistan a "partner country" for Belgian assistance with several officials in the MFA and Ministry of Development Cooperation. De Witte said he could see the value of such a designation, but noted that the Development Ministry is not enthusiastic, as we know from conversations with officials from that ministry. Achieving such a designation will need continued advocacy from the Embassy. So will the other asks, with the exception of the additional OMLT that was approved April 1 by the kern cabinet. One other possible exception is a PRT, which Defense Minister De Crem told Charge is soon to be announced. De Witte was doubtful that Belgium could lead a PRT, but did not rule out contributing to another one as is the case in Kunduz, where Belgium participates in a German-led PRT. De Witte also said that the requested USD 10 million per year for the Afghan National Army Trust Fund will have to come from Ministry of Defense funds, because Belgian development assistance cannot fund the military. As a practical matter, we know the Ministry of Defense has little or no extra money to spend on such a large request.

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